

MICHAEL C. BURGESS, M.D.  
26TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

WASHINGTON OFFICE:  
1721 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-7772

DISTRICT OFFICES:  
1660 SOUTH STEMMONS FREEWAY  
SUITE 230  
LEWISVILLE, TX 75067  
(972) 434-9700

1100 CIRCLE DRIVE  
SUITE 200  
FORT WORTH, TX 76119  
(817) 531-8454

[www.house.gov/burgess](http://www.house.gov/burgess)

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-4326

*Medical Focus - Avian Flu Essentials*

December 7, 2005

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*"We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something." – Sandra Day O'Connor*

Dear Colleague:

In the ninth letter in the Avian Flu Essentials series, I will underscore the need for a sustained, augmented health care and volunteer work force.

A pandemic is predicted to come in waves and would last many months, in contrast with a natural disaster, where the aftermath is solely focused on coping with the devastation of that one occurrence. In addition, as multiple outbreaks could occur in the United States, it would be more difficult to request neighboring states and communities for assistance.

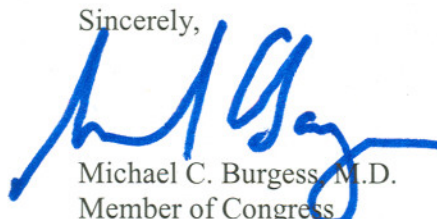
A database with emergency contact information for health care workers in a range of vocations, including physicians, nurses, technicians, is necessary. Furthermore, a plan to rotate the community workforce to prevent fatigue as well as to offer support services to these workers is critical to ensure that health care is available throughout the pandemic.

When the Department of Health and Human Services met with all fifty states and local officials to discuss avian flu on December 5, Joe Becker, the American Red Cross Senior Vice President, stated that generally thirty percent of volunteers are not available during a disaster. It is hard to predict how many would show up during a pandemic. Therefore, recruitment and training should begin now so that potential volunteers can become more familiar with the tasks that they would be expected to complete as well as address their potential concerns about this health threat.

To deal with both the need for health care workers and volunteers, a county health department in Ohio is creating a volunteer-based medical reserve corps that would be comprised of individuals in both groups. These members would be certified and trained in advance.

The scope and magnitude of a pandemic will be immense. Health care is a field that will be severely challenged. In order to continue to provide excellent and timely services, it will also rely on the community and volunteers to aid in the pandemic response. Knowing which volunteer organizations and individuals can be turned to in advance will undoubtedly serve to enhance preparedness efforts.

Sincerely,



Michael C. Burgess, M.D.  
Member of Congress